

Herodotus; and in almost every country of which history has preserved to us any record, the oldest writers appear to be the poets. The most ancient buildings, too, of every country of which we have now any memorial, appear not to have been erected for any purposes of mere comfort or utility, but to gratify the passion of mankind for grandeur and renown, or to fulfil some object of devotion. In this way, it appears probable that architecture flourished as an art before the erection of buildings for domestic purposes had made any considerable progress; so that in architectural as well as in literary composition, the difficulty appears to have preceded the familiar and easy.

The architecture as well as the poetry of Greece were the spontaneous produce of the soil, and both reached a pitch of excellence which has never since been surpassed. The science and useful arts of the Greeks were, no doubt, imported from the East; but their fine arts were an indigenous production. This is, perhaps, in a great measure due to the restricted intercourse which in early times subsisted between Greece and other parts of the world, as well as to the sentiment prevalent in that country, that every thing barbarian was unworthy of imitation. The Greeks studied no foreign language, and were unacquainted with any foreign literature; and their poetry was, therefore, a truer reflection of nature than if it had come to them through a thousand successive delineations, each inferior to its prototype in power and beauty. The Pelagic ballads, like the ballad poetry of every nation, were the immediate offspring of the joys or sorrows or aspirations of the people; and these grew by degrees into the Epic, Tragic, and Lyric forms of poetry. There was no change in substance, however: the same opinions and the same emotions continued in unabated activity, and the Greek poetry remained as strictly national as when its minstrels knew little beyond the bounds of Attica and the Peloponneseus. In the most refined Grecian architecture, again, the insignia of a ruder era continued to be copied with scrupulous fidelity. The dovesails and iron hoops upon the columns, which were necessary in the original wooden buildings, continued to be copied in buildings of stone; so that, in the height of its perfection, the Greek architecture retained its primitive features—elevated and refined, it is true, but still unchanged in all its distinctive characteristics.

The Romans copied the architecture and literature of the Greeks; and both were to a certain extent modified by them. Any great change, however, must have appeared neither necessary nor desirable—the customs, climate, and religion of the two people being so nearly identical. When Constantine, however, after the introduction of Christianity, transferred the seat of the empire from Rome to Byzantium, the construction of a large number of churches became necessary; and as Byzantium had no pagan temples to supply the materials, an opportunity was afforded for distinguishing the Christian from the Pagan edifices, of which advantage was taken for introducing numberless innovations. The Roman basilicas, with their long vaultless avenues, were suppressed, and the form of the Greek cross, in the plan of the churches, was generally adopted. The ancient styles being thus fairly broken through, an infinite number of fantastic devices were adopted; and these, after a few centuries of gyration, settled into the Gothic style of architecture. In Rome, however, this revolutionary passion did not attain any high pitch; and there are no churches of note to be found there of any style intervening between that of the primitive basilica and that of the modern antique.

On the revival of classical studies throughout Gothic Europe, the poetry which had previously been representative of the true sentiments of the people, acquired an artificial and exotic character which it has never since entirely lost. Heathen gods and muses appeared in the poetry of Christian nations, and the democratic language of ancient republics was copied by feudal aristocracy. It was only the forms, however, of antiquity which were borrowed; the chivalrous spirit remained unchanged, but the dress and ornament of classic ages were adopted, instead of new modes being permitted to spring spontaneously from existing sentiments and customs. Tasso's Jerusalem was in all its outward characteristics a

Grecian epic, but his heroes were Christian warriors and churchmen, and throughout Italy, where this affection for antiquity began, an abundant introduction of Hellenic forms was looked upon as a mark of refinement. Concurrently with these indications, the architecture of the ancients began to be extensively introduced, and the construction of St. Peter's, and numerous other magnificent edifices, about this time, revived the affection for the architecture of the ancients throughout the nations of Europe. In England, however, the Gothic still continued to flourish, and our literature nearly up to the time of Shakespeare remained unimpaired by foreign innovations. About the time of Elizabeth, fantastic combinations of chivalrous feeling and classical pedantry began to prevail; and at the same juncture our architecture began to exhibit a species of transformation, of which, John of Padua, and other adventurers were the instruments. But in spite of these indications, we should be disposed to set down this era as being the climax of that progress in architecture and literature which began about the times of Chaucer and William of Wykeham, and ended with Shakespeare, and the architecture of Henry the Seventh; and which has never yet been surpassed in this country. There is no part of our literature, or of our architecture, that is so national; and although it may display occasional vices which do not attach to a later period, there is none distinguished by so many virtues.

These analogies are not, we think, accidental, and a further inquiry will show that they extend down even to our own times. Inigo Jones and others introduced the Italian style into England, about the time of Ben Jonson. Dryden and his successors remoulded our poetry on the classic model. The innovations thus introduced reached their greatest altitude in the hands of Pope and Sir Christopher Wren, from which time they have been gradually declining. The declension, however, has been extremely slow; and the transition to a new state is probably not as yet much more than half completed. The engaging fancy of Collins, and sublime genius of Gray, failed to achieve any great change in poetical composition, simply because the fulness of time had not yet come, and the exertions of Vanbrugh and Sir W. Chambers, to adapt the predominating architectural forms more completely to our wants and uses, have almost entirely failed from the self-same cause. The public mind had sunk into a kind of lethargy, and was satisfied with that negative species of excellence which consists in the absence of all offensive characteristics. The French literature, which had been slower in its growth than that of other European nations, reached its maturity at this period, and consequently acquired almost faultless elegance at the expense of originality and strength. The desire to make it classical made it timid and imitative, and deprived it of the charm of nature. The emulation, however, which preceded the French revolution, put an end to this state of things. An avidity for strong emotion succeeded to the desire to avoid disgust, and the effect of the agitation of men's minds upon literature became more visible as the time of the explosion approached more nearly. Rousseau and Goethe, by their works of fiction began to exercise a powerful influence over the public imagination, and in our own country the poignant lines of Pope and his followers began to lose their charms, and gave way before the animating stanzas of Scott, and the soul-stirring poetry of Byron. In architecture, the change corresponding to this change in literature has not yet taken place. It is still in a state of elegant imbecility; but a revolution is, we believe, at hand, and is foreshadowed by our poetical mutations, to which our architectural proclivity appears to be inseparably bound, though the length of the tie may occasionally vary. Both, in fact, are merely modes of one elementary principle, and this principle is itself affected by almost every conceivable modification in the state of the community. Neither the poetry nor the architecture of the times of the Heptarchy could become popular at the present day, though there are manifestly some qualities both in the buildings and poetry which delighted our ancestors, which must continue to please in all ages. The contemporaneous condition of the public feeling will exercise a powerful influence on particular

modes, and even independently of such accidents, revolutions in taste will sometimes occur from the mere influence of satiety. Men in course of time become tired even of excellence, and will have a new fashion, even though it should be a worse.

It is needless to dwell, however, on such speculations, for none of our readers, we believe, will be inclined to dispute that an affection for novelty and strong emotion does not constitute one of the ruling features of the present age. This perpetual aspiration for something new has been manifested in architecture, though not by any means to the same extent as in those arts which deal in less costly productions. Indeed, the expense and durability of architectural works make the art in the strictest sense of the word a conservative one; every one is disinclined to introduce innovations which may fail to earn public approbation, and which, if unsuccessful, cannot be remedied without a great expenditure. In the smaller class of works this objection does not equally apply, and in such works new styles of decoration should, we think, be introduced as frequently as possible by way of experiment. It is thus only that architecture can be made a progressive art, and an art which is not progressive must necessarily retrograde. In all attempts at improvement, failure must of course from time to time occur, but even failure will minister to a further progress—often more effectually than uniform success. We believe that at no time in our history would architectural innovation be more favourably received than at present; the poets have already prepared the way, and the public mind was never more intent on that onward progress which flows from the worship of perfection.—*The Artizan.*

#### BUILDING REGULATIONS BILL.

*Report of the Executive Committee of the Metropolitan Improvement Society, on the Bill introduced by the Earl of Lincoln and Sir James Graham, entitled "A Bill for the better Regulating the Buildings of the Metropolitan Districts, and to provide for the Drainage thereof."*

In considering the above measure as submitted for legislative sanction, we should examine—

1. The object of the Bill.

2. The proposed means of effecting the object.

3. The subordinate details.

The object of the Bill is not simply to extend the operation of the existing Building Act, and to clear up the ambiguities complained of in its various clauses. The present Bill is almost entirely a new measure, of which the leading principle is, that all new houses shall be stronger built than was required by the former Act: to which end the most minute regulations are prescribed with regard to the solidity of foundations, the thickness of walls, and the scantlings of the timbers to be used in floors and roofs.

Of the spirit and intention of the measure no one can disapprove: the framers of the Bill were doubtless desirous of providing better habitations than the present for the humbler classes of the community; but the whole of the clauses to which the new regulations refer, appear to be founded upon a misapprehension of the power of Parliament, and of the kind of improvements most needed in the dwellings of the poor.

It should always be borne in mind that the Legislature cannot compel builders to erect expensive houses for tenants who have not the means of paying a remunerative rent. Any serious and needless addition, therefore, to the cost of third and fourth-rate houses, is almost equivalent to a prohibition of this class of buildings; and before such a prohibition is sanctioned by Parliament, it would be well to look at the consequence.

The humblest tenements now erected in the suburbs find occupants, because the accommodation they provide, however inferior, is, after all, better than that of the cellar or garret in which the same families formerly resided. Put a stop to the building of small houses—the tendency of the present Bill—and what follow? Families occupying garrets and cellars must remain in them; and thus to many thousands in London, who have no better